

RG-50.146.0014

Oral history interview with Ilex Beller

Summary

Ilex Beller, born in 1914 in Galicia, Poland to a Jewish family; father died when he was born; his mother had a very hard life; Ilex went to a Polish school because the Jewish school was too expensive; he wanted to leave Poland because of the rampant anti-Semitism; he left in 1929 and arrived in Belgium; in Belgium, he worked in the coal mines; he entered into the Communist movement and met the brothers Akerman; he was expelled from Belgium because he did not have the right to fight for the Belgian military; went to Paris in 1934 where he lived in Belleville; he continued to work for the Communist movement in Paris; the party members met at a café with Pierre George up until 1936; Ilex then went to Spain to fight and was injured and came back to France in 1938; in 1939, three thousand young foreign Jews went into the French army; he was mobilized in 1940 against the German offensive; he was wounded and brought to Rennes where he was operated on; after the armistice, injured soldiers could stay in France and Ilex was evacuated to Sète where he was reunited with his wife who was pregnant with their first child; they went to Carcassonne with other Jewish refugees; next came the occupation of the Free Zone by the Germans; Ilex went to Marseille, then to Lyon with his family; he learned that his son (one and a half years old) could be housed in Switzerland so he and his family went to Switzerland where they stayed until the end of the war; at the end of 1942, they crossed the border into Switzerland; they were placed in a military camp; women and children stayed in hotels and men in work camps; Ilex knew about the extermination camps in the east after speaking with two Germans; after the invasion of the Allies, Ilex and his family returned to Paris where he began a new life; many of his friends did not come back and others had been deported to S.T.O camps; Ilex describes the attitude in Switzerland towards the Jews as initially very anti-Semitic, but after Stalingrad there was a change in this attitude; Ilex goes on to describe life in the labor camp in Switzerland; they were not allowed to exit and re-enter to camp freely; there was also a Jewish culture in the camps; Ilex continues to describe his re-entry into France and a normal life; veterans returning to France had numerous problems (e.g. no lodgment, unable to find their families); they created an organization for children who were without their parents; Ilex had two other sons after the war; he describes his travels after the war to Poland; Ilex notes how he wishes to transmit this memory to future generations.

English summary provided by Ethan T. Ashley